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ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY

Hon. SETH LOW,

AT

GETTYSBURG, OCTOBER 19, 1887,

AT THE

DEDICATION OF THE SOLDIERS' MONUMENT,

TO THE

FOURTEENTH REGIMENT OF BROOKLYN.

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VETERANS of the Brooklyn Fourteenth, Widows and Wives and Daughters of Veterans, you who endured at home, while those whom you loved dared everything at the front, Members of the Regiment, Gentlemen of the Brooklyn City Government, and Fellow-citizens :

Standing here at Gettysburg, we seem to be standing on one of the mountain-tops of history. Cemetery Ridge is but a little eminence, yet from its consecrated summit the eye commands a vision wider and more wonderful than any to be seen from the loftiest Sierra. Here, looking backwards, we seem to see not alone the nation's past, spreading beneath us like a map, but out of the shadowy distance we seem to see, converging here, the multitudinous roads along which men have struggled, during all the ages, towards the conception of a free State, existing for and maintained by a free people. Here, looking forwards, "the distance beacons" to a glowing future, bright with hope for the multitudes

of men. Not in vain have they fought and died whose fortunate mission it was to interpret the past and to bless the future.

Neither does it lack significance that this battle should have been fought on the soil of Pennsylvania. The popular faculty, which so often gives names with a deep insight into the real significance of things, long ago called Pennsylvania the Keystone State. Historically, no less than geographically, the name applies. In the majestic arch formed by this Union of independent States, Pennsylvania always has been the keystone. Upon the soil of Pennsylvania met the first and the second Continental Congress. Upon the soil of Pennsylvania, George Washington was commissioned Commander in Chief of the Continental Armies. Upon the soil of Pennsylvania was made the immortal Declaration of Independence. Upon the soil of Pennsylvania the Liberty Bell first of all rang out the joyful peal of liberty throughout the land. It was here that Franklin drew lightning from the sky, and it was here were forged the thunderbolts which made the Colonies independent States. Again, at Gettysburg, in our own generation, were hurled the bolts which have made the Union free.

The Civil War, in which the battle of Gettysburg was the turning point, became inevitable when the Constitution of the United States recognized and permitted slavery within our borders. Whatever other issues of constitutional interpretation were involved, they all hinged upon slavery, as that which gave to them all their chief meaning and consequence. At the outbreak of the war men did not see this clearly, as they see it now. The preservation of the Union was the rallying cry; and men said it oftentimes without at all realizing how grand a cry it was. The preservation of the Union by no possibility could involve only the life of the nation. It involved necessarily the freedom of a race and the best hopes of mankind. Without slavery

*Jeff*  
*Jonathan D. Shuman*  
*Dec 13, 1940*

the national life never would have been in danger. Without the abolition of slavery the preservation of the Union was a dream. Yet the war began with the most emphatic declarations that slavery should not be disturbed. In the beginning, one hundred years ago, the Fathers admitted slavery into the Constitution, because without it the Union could not have been formed. For seventy years, compromise after compromise was made with reference to slavery, for the preservation of the Union, in the vain hope of preserving a political fabric undisturbed, which had within itself forces as antagonistic as light and darkness. At last it was open war, and defeat followed defeat for the soldiers of the Union, until it became certain that the Union, when preserved, would be a Union wholly free. At Gettysburg were discerned, for the first time, the faint beginnings of the longed-for end. Here were pronounced at last, to the wild, swelling waves of slavery's great sea, the words of Omnipotence, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further."

Most fittingly, the army through which this decree was uttered was the Army of the Potomac. For two long, weary years that magnificent body of soldiers had endured defeat and disaster. Not always being worsted in isolated encounters, they still were exposed constantly to the most trying of all military experiences, where defeat brought disaster and victory brought small advantage. Still, though defeated often, they were invincible.

" Trampled and beaten were they as the sand,  
And yet unshaken as the Continent."

Commanders there have been sometimes, who, by their overpowering genius, have led their conquering legions without a defeat from the first small victory to the complete triumph. Others, again, after a career of dazzling success, have marched to humiliating overthrow. Still others, by their intrepidity and unyielding



courage, have held their shattered troops about them until despair turned into victory. But I can think of no other case where the army was of itself superior to the fate of its leaders. Commanders might come and commanders might go, but the Army of the Potomac could not be beaten. It could not, indeed, subdue its enemy, until a leader worthy of itself was at its head, but that enemy dashed itself in vain against its heroic columns until, under the lead of the great Commander, the Army of the Potomac ground even its valiant antagonist to powder.

Here, at Gettysburg, the tide of war began to turn. The presence of these regimental monuments, in large numbers, reveals the popular recognition that this, in a sense peculiar to itself, was the pivotal battle of the war. Step with me for a moment to yonder cemetery, "where the bones of heroes rest." There you shall see the graves of men from eighteen of our States, from Maine, on the East, to Minnesota, on the West. Side by side with the graves over whose heads the name of their State appears, breathing, as it were, a benison from home, you shall see almost one thousand graves of the nameless dead. Comrades, how hard it seems! To die for one's country; to yield this last full measure of a patriot's devotion; and not even to have it known that you have died! Not known; not known, indeed, here, but well known, I like to think, by Him who seeth in secret that He may reward openly.

You may have heard the anecdote of the Southern man who saw the great review of the Union armies in Washington at the end of the war. As the troops went marching by, carrying the banners of Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, the regimental numbers indicating the multitudes of soldiers that had come from all these States, he rubbed his eyes, and asked where those States were. When he had studied geography, he said, there were no such States. Soon he identified



them as part of the Northwest Territory and its neighborhood, when he uttered this reflection: "If we could but have known—if we could but have known." The sagacity of Jefferson, he saw, in dedicating to Freedom in 1787 this great Northwest Territory, after all had brought to naught in the end the slavery permitted in the Constitution. But if the new States did their part heroically, the old States were equally worthy of their traditions and their history. Yonder cemetery contains more men from the State of New-York than from any other State, and through the war she maintained her primacy. The other day I was in the Adirondacks, and in the little town of Keene, with its few hundreds of population, I found a Grand Army post numbering still 39 members. So they came from the hillside and from the plain, from the forest and from the open, and so, with equal devotion, they came from the great cities of the State. The official records show that from Brooklyn over 32,000 men went to the front, and the Brooklyn of that day was a city of little more than 200,000 people. Among this number the first to enlist, and the equal of any regiment in either army in gallantry and heroic service, was the regiment in whose honor this monument is erected. While known, also, as the 84th New-York State Volunteers, it always has been best known and best loved as the Brooklyn 14th. For this reason, and by reason of its permanency as a militia regiment, both before and since the war, it has come to be looked upon as the typical Brooklyn War regiment. Never did city have a grander regiment upon which to bestow its affection and its pride. The fateful shot at Sumter went hurling through the frightened air on the 12th of April, 1861. Just six days thereafter report was made to headquarters that the 14th Regiment was in readiness to be marched to the front! This was its answer to the call for volunteers—prompt, courageous, patriotic. It meant business. When on the way to Washington the Colonel, then Alfred M. Wood, received

a despatch from the Governor of New-York, asking him by what authority he had taken his regiment out of the State without orders. Colonel Wood replied: "By authority of Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, and we hope with your approval." This reply suggests the remark which Lincoln himself is said to have made to Secretary Chase at about the same period. "These rebels are violating the Constitution to destroy the Union. I will violate the Constitution, if necessary, to save the Union." It needed no prophet to foretell that such a regiment would acquit itself with honor. It began its fighting at Bull Run. There Colonel Wood was wounded and taken prisoner. Colonel Wood's wound disabled him for further service, even after he was exchanged, and from that time the regiment fought under the command of our gallant and modest friend, Colonel Fowler, except for a brief period after the second battle of Bull Run, in which engagement Colonel Fowler also was seriously wounded. During this interval the Regiment was commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel William H. Debevoise. Colonel Wood's experiences as a prisoner were exceptional. About that time some Confederate privateersmen had been made prisoners, and it was proposed by some that they should be treated as pirates. In response to this proposition the Confederate authorities took Colonel Wood and others and held them as hostages in the County jail. Others of the regiment, officers and men, found themselves in Libby Prison. I have been much struck, in reading a letter from one of this number, with the dreariness of a military prisoner's life. Leaving aside all questions of cruelty, the monotony and weariness of it must have been almost beyond endurance to men full of vigor.

I wish to pay my tribute of grateful honor to the heroism which suffered in this form, no less than to the gallantry which on field after field dared every chance of war. Soon most of these first prisoners were ex-

changed, and one can well imagine the scene when they found themselves once more under the Stars and Stripes. Of both those who were released and those who welcomed them, the contemporary account says, "every eye was dim with tears." So quickly did the Brooklyn Fourteenth sound the whole deep meaning of that horrid word, war.

When Col. Wood found himself free, and within the Union lines again, the regiment was in camp near Washington. He repaired at once to his command to receive their congratulations upon his release. "The regiment appeared," so says the chronicler, "in the 'peculiar chasseur dress for which it has become famous—the red pants, dark blue jacket, with two rows of bell buttons, and red breast-piece, having also a row of bell buttons, and red cap.'" "Col. Wood assured the boys that they had established at Manassas a reputation which they might well strive to maintain, 'for,' said he, 'you are the dread of the enemy.'" "Everywhere he had been assured by Confederate officers that his regiment, the 'red legs,' had fought more desperately than any other at the field of Bull Run." This testimony is supported by the praise the regiment received from the Union Commander, by whom it was named, with special mention, in General Orders. Thus, its first battle found the regiment already the "fighting Fourteenth." I do not propose to follow the regiment from field to field, but I do desire at this time, as matter of historical record, to name the different engagements in which the regiment took part :

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|-----------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Bull Run.                | 6. Sulphur Springs. |
| 2. Binn's Hill.             | 7. Gainesville.     |
| 3. Falmouth.                | 8. Groveton.        |
| 4. Spottsylvania, Aug. '62. | 9. Manassas Plains. |
| 5. Rappahannock Station.    | 10. Chantilly.      |

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|------------------------|--------------------|
| 11. South Mountain.    | 17. Seminary Hill. |
| 12. Antietam.          | 18. Gettysburg.    |
| 13. Fredericksburg.    | 19. Mine Run.      |
| 14. Port Royal.        | 20. Wilderness.    |
| 15. Fitzhugh Crossing. | 21. Laurel Hill.   |
| 16. Chancellorsville.  | 22. Spottsylvania. |

A roll of honor long enough and splendid enough to satisfy the greatest caviler.

From contemporary newspaper accounts sent to the journals of other cities than Brooklyn, which I quote as presumably impartial, as also by extracts from the official records, I am able to show, in a measure, how the regiment appeared at the time in the eyes of others.

Here is an item touching their services at Fredericksburg: "The brilliant feat of the Brooklyn Fourteenth "in keeping up, without straggling, with the Cavalry and "Artillery on a march of twenty-six miles, during the "hottest day of the season, and then, with but three "hours' rest, dashing on after the enemy's cavalry for "four miles, is the subject of most flattering encomiums."

The regiment led the advance at the capture of Fredericksburg by Gen. Augur. After the battle had been fought "anxiety was manifested," so reads the record, "to know by whom the 14th Regiment of Brooklyn "was led during the gallant advance upon the town."

I need not tell you, men of the Fourteenth, that it was led then, as so often on other fields, with equal bravery and skill, by Col. E. B. Fowler, since General by brevet for his services during the war. In the spring of 1863, Gen. Reynolds, that superb fighter, issued a special order, thanking the Brooklyn 14th and the 24th Michigan, for their splendid services on the expedition to Port Royal. At South Mountain and Antietam, when under the command of Lieut.-Col. Debevoise, the regiment signalized itself as usual by its brilliant

charges. And so we come with them to Gettysburg. It was their fortune to be with Gen. Reynolds in the heavy fighting of the first day, when a fragment of the Union Army held the great body of Confederates in check, until the Union forces could be brought up in sufficient numbers to make a successful stand on Cemetery Ridge. They were among the first, if not themselves the first, to begin the infantry fighting of that memorable struggle.

The sad duty fell to them of removing from the field the body of the heroic Reynolds, when he fell directly behind their lines. Nothing daunted even by this disaster, they added lustre to their already glorious record. They held their ground until flanked, and then, falling back and changing front, all the time under fire, they, in company with the 95th New-York and the 6th Wisconsin, all under command at the moment of Col. Fowler, drove back the enemy in their front, Davis' Mississippi brigade, and upon this ground where we now stand compelled a large part of them to surrender. It is recorded that they took more prisoners here than the regiments engaged had men. Thus you will see this is indeed the proper spot upon which to place the monument we have dedicated to-day. The life blood of many of our brothers has enriched the underlying soil; the wounded in their agony have here looked up in prayer to the bending sky; and here the blessings of a grateful nation have descended upon the brows of the living and the dead.

“ Whene’er a noble deed is wrought,  
 Whene’er is spoken a noble thought,  
 Our hearts, in glad surprise,  
 To higher levels rise.

“ The tidal wave of deeper souls  
 Into our inmost being rolls,  
 And lifts us unawares  
 Out of all meaner cares.”



To commemorate and to perpetuate the memory of not one but many such noble deeds, this monument to the 14th Regiment of Brooklyn is dedicated to-day, by the survivors of the Regiment, by their comrades and friends, by the grateful State of New-York, and by their fellow-citizens of Brooklyn. Still, let it be remembered, that the services of the 14th Regiment at Gettysburg were not confined to the fighting about this railroad cut. On the second day, and on the third, they engaged the enemy in the vicinity of Culp's Hill. After dark of the second day they were proceeding to position to reinforce Gen. Greene on the right of our line, when Col. Fowler was surprised to receive fire from a position within our lines which he supposed to be held by Union troops. Not being sure whether they were our own troops or the enemy, volunteers were called for to ascertain. One fell wounded, but one returned, reporting that it was the 10th Virginia. A volley from the Fourteenth caused the Virginia regiment to retire from the woods in which they were, and where they occupied a position in relation to our lines full of peril to our army. Thus, through small incidents and through great, the battle raged until the Union forces were everywhere successful.

The loss of the 14th Regiment in the battle of Gettysburg was 217, out of 356 officers and men engaged.

A writer at the time to one of the New-York papers says: "The heroic and gallant 2d, 9th and 14th Regiments, N. Y. S. N. G., have been almost wiped out of existence in the recent bloody conflicts on the soil of Pennsylvania and Maryland. There remains but a small band of them now; but oh what scenes of courage has that handful of veterans lived through. Always in the front, fearless and unflinching, they have stood where the havoc of war raged the wildest, and passed on through fire and sword into the enemy's works. No regulars that ever served on any field have won more



imperishable honor than these three regiments of militia. Had a Napoleon lived and seen their deeds of daring, he would have chosen them for his Imperial Guard."

And these men of the 14th Regiment, gentlemen, were our neighbors and friends.

After Gettysburg, the Fourteenth served until the 22d May, 1864, taking heroic part, as always, in all the battles down to and including the battle of Spottsylvania, in the famous Wilderness Campaign.

It was their singular honor to be the first regiment to receive General Grant when, as Commander in Chief, he joined the Army of the Potomac. I quote the following record of this period from the report of Colonel Fowler. "Although the time of the Fourteenth had nearly expired, the men stood the brunt of battle nobly. Not a case of desertion occurred, and but little murmuring. Many a brave spirit winged its flight heavenward, who, in the body, had counted the days that would elapse ere he would be in the embrace of dear ones at home."

A Washington correspondent writes, under date of May 24, 1864: "The 14th Brooklyn Regiment, Colonel Fowler, arrived here to-day from the front, and left to-night for New-York. Of 2,100 men it has had in the service, but 91 officers and men return—a sad, but glorious commentary upon its achievements."

Well might the City of Brooklyn welcome it with every honor. "Welcome, the brave Fourteenth, out of the Wilderness!"

The regiment, having enlisted for three years, returned home, thin enough indeed in ranks, but full of honors. About one hundred men, who had become members of the regiment at various dates, and whose terms of service had not yet expired, were incorporated into the Fifth Regiment of New-York Veterans. Here they upheld their old credit with undiminished gallantry. Six, at least, became officers, two being promoted on the field of battle for bravery in action. The subsequent services

of these men, no less than the record of the regiment as such, are lovingly commemorated by this monument. Circumstances prevented them from sharing in the triumphant return home of the regiment to whose glory they contributed so largely. It is fitting that at this hour glad recognition should be made of their services, and that they should be claimed by Brooklyn as an integral portion of her famous fighting regiment.

Now, four and twenty years after the mighty struggle of Gettysburg, we are gathered here, a handful of people out of the great multitudes of Brooklyn, to dedicate this monument to the Brooklyn Fourteenth. What does it signify? Abraham Lincoln said, in that marvelous address which he made in yonder cemetery, it was here decided that "government of the people, by the people and for the people, should not perish from the earth." Certainly, then, the monument means this, by way of history, that in that august decision, weighty with far-reaching consequences on both sides the great sea, and in every quarter of the globe, the 14th Regiment, and through them the City of Brooklyn, bore glorious part.

Who shall presume to say what the monument means to you who are veterans of the regiment? To you, and indeed to us, the spot whereon we stand is holy ground. Around and about us are similar monuments marking the fidelity and heroism of other men. But, to you, this monument has a sacred significance all its own. It tells you of comrades who were not afraid to die. It tells you of comrades who were not afraid to live, robbed of their health, crippled in limb, the wrecks of the men who went with you to the front. It tells you of yourselves, how that it is a sublime thing at such a time to have been true and brave.

But what shall the monument mean to me, and to others like me, who have come to manhood since the war, to all who, being non-participants in the fighting, have yet shared in the glorious results? What would

you have it mean to us, you who here for our sakes looked in the eyes of death and were not afraid? Speaking for myself, and for the generation to which I belong, we stand in your presence with uncovered heads. We give you, with full hearts, the meed of gratitude and of glory that men have given, always, to those who have fought their battles. We look upon you, and upon such as you, with a touch of reverence, as upon those who have preserved all that as citizens of this great, free land, we hold most dear. God grant that the record of your deeds, and the memory of your self-sacrifices, may inspire us, and all your fellow-citizens, with a patriotic devotion to the country we all love so well. May the power of your example never die, but wax stronger and stronger with the growing years. But beyond all this, what would you have us young men say of the war in which you fought? And what shall we say of the men against whom you fought? Certainly let us say this, in any presence, that you fought for the right and that they fought for the wrong. But would you have us speak of the war only as a rebellion? Shall it seem to us only a causeless and wicked war, brought about for their own purposes by designing and ambitious men? "It must needs be that offences come, but woe unto that man by whom the offence cometh." So shall we not rather admit, with the candor of truth, that the seeds of the war may be traced back to the Constitution itself, to that Constitution which, in the words of Fitz Hugh Lee the other day, as he sorrowfully said, permitted slavery, and was silent as to the right of secession? I bring no charge against the framers of the Constitution. They did their part, and they were in nothing more wise than in not attempting to do what was beyond their power. The attempt to settle these questions then would have made the Union impossible. They rightly judged that if they could make the Constitution of the nation

sound and strong, it would of itself cast out whatever was hostile to its life. And is not this what happened, and are not these the questions which you have decided once for all upon the supreme appeal to arms, you later Constitution-makers, fellow laborers with the fathers, Washington, Jefferson, Hamilton, Franklin, Madison, and all their goodly company? If this be so, if this be the view that placid History will take when she comes to record, with impartial pen, the story of these stirring years, then may not we, your countrymen and theirs, casting away all bitterness, rejoice that we are once more fellow-citizens with them as well as with you, in a Union so much stronger and better than it was before? And, indeed, my countrymen, let us thank God that it is so. "Government of the people, by the people and for the people," was not more strengthened by your victory than it was by the re-admission into all their rights as fellow-citizens of those who had been your foes. Without this crowning triumph your victory would have been meaningless. Had this been impossible, the Union would have perished on the same field where your enemies surrendered. But now are we all called, they as well as we, to make the renewed Union more glorious than before. Out of the war, unquestionably, has sprung a material growth and development unimagined in the earlier years. Out of the war, let a profounder faith in the whole people grow, and a deeper sense of fellowship between man and man! We need that faith and that fellowship every hour. Popular government rests, at all times, upon a just faith in the people, and upon their capacity for self-sacrifice, a capacity which expresses itself sometimes in self-restraint, sometimes in self-surrender. The civil war was the crowning effort of our people's self-surrender. Cheerfully, ungrudgingly, both sides marched to the front, facing death without a murmur. Cheerfully, ungrudgingly, they laid upon themselves a burden of taxation such as no tyrant

would have dared to impose. Cheerfully, ungrudgingly, each have borne all the sad consequences of the conflict, until together they have come out into the brighter day. For such a people all things are possible while they retain the spirit of the men of the mighty generation to which you belong. This monument is Brooklyn's tribute to that spirit as it showed itself at Gettysburg. It shall speak to us not so much of strife as of consecration, not so much of death as of life, not so much of suffering as of glory, not so much of loss as of gain. May it speak always to willing ears. To-night, comrades and fellow-citizens, we leave this consecrated spot and return to our distant home. But we leave it, not as it has been, eloquent only to the few who knew its story. We leave behind us this beautiful memorial of our admiration and our love, a happiness to our own hearts and an inspiration to all others who shall pass this way.











